



**VSBA**

Virginia School Boards Association

# Equity in Education Month Guide

March 2025



*Participation in VSBA initiatives and observances is optional. School boards in Virginia have the discretion on whether to participate locally. Any related materials from the Association are shared as suggested ideas for implementation for any member board that may choose to do so.*

[www.vsba.org](http://www.vsba.org) | 434-295-8722 | 800-446-8722

# March 2025 – VSBA Equity in Education Month

Dear School Board Members and Superintendents:

School systems exist to deliver positive student outcomes. Public schools in Virginia drive our Commonwealth's economic, social, and excellence of quality of life through their commitment to preparing our students for success in college, career, military, and other productive pathways our students pursue. To increase awareness of and support for each and every student in Virginia, the VSBA Board of Directors has designated the month of March as VSBA Equity in Education Month.

The VSBA Task Force on Students and Schools in Challenging Environments was established by the Board of Directors in 2013 to educate state and local policy makers on how VSBA can partner to help challenged students and schools in Virginia, and to identify and share research, resources, and strategies that will empower Virginia's schools to reach higher levels of student achievement. As a result of listening to board members and superintendents, interacting with parents and students, conducting extensive data analyses, and engaging with public and private sector leaders, the Task Force determined that every school division in Virginia serves students who can benefit from this month-long focus, combined with year-round action.

The Task Force has played a key role in providing federal, state, and local school boards with best practices for educating students in challenged schools and students who may face unique obstacles no matter which school they attend. As part of this, the Task Force developed five areas of best practice to help improve the equity in education. We must work together to ensure that all students, regardless of their zip code or size of their school division, receive the support necessary to achieve positive academic outcomes. From NOVA to Southwest Virginia, when inequities persist, there are costs to all involved including missed opportunities for economic development, increased need for community support, and fewer Virginians ready to serve and lead.

School board members, superintendents, teachers, and families play a critical role in creating a climate and curriculum where all students receive the resources they need, so they graduate prepared for success after high school.

VSBA will publicize Equity in Education Month in our newsletter, on the VSBA website, and through social media. School divisions are encouraged to issue their own news releases, and it would be helpful if divisions would apprise the VSBA of any related activities taking place in their division. Potential activities could include:

- Adopt a proclamation like the one adopted by the VSBA Board of Directors (see enclosed).
- Write a letter to the editor or contact a local reporter to see if they will do a story about educational equity initiatives taking place in the division.
- Hold school or division student contests (poster, video, writing, etc.) around the theme of "Equity in Education."

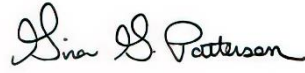
This guide includes several resources to assist you in these efforts, including references and links to all three Reports from the Task Force on Students and Schools in Challenging Environments, a proclamation adopted by the VSBA Board of Directors, a sample news release, governance tips for equity in a divided community, and information on understanding equity vs. equality in education.

We hope you will take advantage of this opportunity to spread awareness, examine, and discuss strategies, and review current trends and best practices that will positively impact the educational outcomes for all students.

Sincerely,



Dr. JoWanda Rollins-Fells  
VSBA President



Gina G. Patterson  
Executive Director

# Areas of Focus & Best Practices

## 1.0 Report:

In October 2014, the Virginia School Boards Association adopted a comprehensive and aspirational report from the Task Force on Students and Schools in Challenging Environments. The Task Force named this report 1.0 with an emphasis on following up with future work. The Task Force, after considerable deliberation and attention to best practices and research, prioritized five domains in the 1.0 report, which were each addressed individually:

- Community & Family Engagement
- Funding & Resources
- Specialized Training
- Student Learning
- Teacher Quality

The Task Force targeted the following groups and aligned practices with advocacy of these groups:

- School Board/Governance Leadership Teams
- Community Groups
- Internal/External Stakeholders (e.g., faculty, parents, business, community, local government)
- General Assembly, including the governor and state officials
- VSBA

In the Spring and Summer of 2018, the VSBA asked the Students and Schools in Challenging Environments Task Force to review the impact of the report. Surveys were completed by school divisions across the Commonwealth indicating that there was a profound impact from the Task Force Report, even with still much work to be done.

[A link to the report can be found by clicking here.](#)

## 2.0 Report:

In September 2020, the Task Force on Students and Schools in Challenging Environments released the 2.0 Report. This report was released during a time in which the Commonwealth and nation were facing multiple issues stemming from the Corona-virus/COVID-19 pandemic. The 2.0 Report acknowledged the deep concerns from Task Force members of the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent shut down of schools from face-to-face instruction and the detrimental impact of the equity framework that the Task Force has consistently advocated.

[A link to the report can be found by clicking here.](#)

## 3.0 Report

In June of 2022, the Task Force on Students and Schools in Challenging Environments released its most recent report, 3.0. Members of the Task Force remained committed to studying the effects of the pandemic on students and schools in challenging environments. The charge to study this topic and make recommendations was affirmed by the VSBA Board of Directors at the August 2021 meeting of the board.

Work leading to the contents of the 3.0 Report began in earnest in the spring of 2021 and the contents of the report were approved for consumption by the public at the June 2022 meeting of the VSBA Board of Directors. For far too many students and schools in challenging environments, COVID-19 worsened structural inequities that have long produced a pandemic of unfinished learning.

[A link to the report can be found by clicking here.](#)

# VSBA Board of Directors Proclamation

**WHEREAS**, inequities in schools have become an increasingly significant challenge in the United States and Virginia; and

**WHEREAS**, the majority of school-aged students are children of color and over fifty percent of public-school students qualify for subsidized meals; and

**WHEREAS**, we recognize that factors including, but not limited to, disability, race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status have a demonstrated history of impacting the educational opportunities provided to a student; and

**WHEREAS**, the promise of public education is for every child to be successful in school and life; and

**WHEREAS**, it is important for Virginia families, students, teachers, and school administrators to be aware of the diverse needs of learners, and to encourage discussion of the challenges as a school community; and

**WHEREAS**, the VSBA has established a Task Force on Students and Schools in Challenging Environments to make recommendations and to stay at the forefront of discussions on equity in Virginia schools; and

**WHEREAS**, we recognize that inequities in resources, including educational settings, supplies, technology, and buildings impede student learning;

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED**, that the Virginia School Boards Association recognized the month of March 2025 as VSBA Equity in Education Month, with the intention that educational equity, best practices, and programming be discussed in Virginia's schools, communities and classrooms during that time.

## News Release

For Immediate Release

[DATE]

### Contact

[NAME]

[EMAIL, PHONE]

### March is VSBA Equity in Education Month

[CITY/COUNTY], VA – School board members, superintendents, teachers, and families can play a critical role in creating a climate and curriculum where all students receive the resources they need so they graduate prepared for success after high school. This is why the Virginia School Boards Association (VSBA) has declared March as VSBA Equity in Education Month.

Equity in education is a significant challenge nationwide. According to the National Center for Education statistics, most public-school students are students of color, and more than half of public-school students qualify for subsidized meals due to low family income. Analysis of student performance data since the COVID-19 pandemic indicates students from every part of our Commonwealth are striving to reach pre-pandemic academic levels. Additionally, large numbers of Virginia's students are facing heightened mental health conditions.

We must ensure that all students, no matter their zip code or size of their school division, receive the support necessary to achieve positive academic outcomes and well-being. When inequity in education persists, there is a cost to all involved, including missed opportunities for economic development, increased need for community support, and fewer Virginians ready to serve and lead.

[INSERT QUOTE FROM BOARD MEMBER AND/OR SUPERINTENDENT]

Local activities include [INSERT LIST OF ACTIVITIES]

### About the Virginia School Boards Association

The Virginia School Boards Association, a voluntary, nonpartisan organization of Virginia school boards, promotes excellence in public education through advocacy, training and services. The Association offers conferences, information, training, and counseling designed to meet the needs of the Commonwealth's educational leaders.

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# Understanding Equity vs. Equality in Education

The terms “equity” and “equality” are often used interchangeably, but they represent fundamentally different approaches to addressing the diverse needs of students in our schools. For school boards, understanding these differences is critical to fostering environments where all students can thrive.

## Equality: Treating everyone the same

Equality is about ensuring everyone receives the same resources or opportunities. While this approach may seem fair at first glance, it assumes that all students start from the same place and have the same needs. In practice, equality often fails to address the disparities that exist within our student populations.

### For example:

Equality is when a school division in a community with ample resources receives the same state support as a division in a community with limited resources.

Equality assumes that all students can succeed with the same tools, such as identical technology or standardized instruction, regardless of their individual circumstances.

## Equity: Meeting unique needs for success

Equity, on the other hand, is about giving each student what they need to succeed. It acknowledges that students have different starting points and barriers to overcome. Equity focuses on allocating resources and support based on those unique needs to ensure every student has the opportunity to achieve their full potential.

### For example:

Equity involves the state allocating funding based on economic need, ensuring divisions with limited resources receive additional support, while still maintaining appropriate funding for divisions with ample resources.

Equity adapts teaching methods and materials to meet the diverse learning needs of students.

## Equity is not a negative word

Unfortunately, the word “equity” is sometimes misunderstood or viewed negatively. It is crucial to emphasize that equity does not mean lowering standards or prioritizing one group over another. Instead, equity ensures that every student has a fair chance to succeed by addressing systemic barriers and leveling the playing field.

### Equity means:

Fairness | Accountability | Opportunities for all students

## Equity in Action: How local school boards can lead the way

- **Access Community Needs:** Conduct equity audits to identify disparities in resources, outcomes, and opportunities.
- **Allocate Resources Thoughtfully:** Direct funding and support to the areas of greatest need, ensuring that all students have access to high-quality education.
- **Engage Stakeholders:** Include students, parents, and community members in conversations about equity to build understanding and trust.
- **Monitor Progress:** Use data to track the effectiveness of equity initiatives and adjust strategies as needed.

We must work together to ensure that all students, regardless of their zip code or size of their school division, receive the support necessary to achieve positive academic outcomes. From NOVA to Southwest Virginia, when inequities persist there are costs to all involved including missed opportunities for economic development, increased need for community support, and fewer Virginians ready to serve and lead. At the VSBA we believe equity is essential to fulfilling the promise of public education. By embracing equity, we ensure that every child—regardless of their background—has the tools, resources, and opportunities they need to succeed.

*Let's continue to work together to create schools where every student can thrive.*



# VSBA

**Virginia School Boards Association**

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